

**MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS**

**August 10, 2010**

**Outreach Efforts to Enroll Permanent Vote by Mail Voters**

Voter participation and an informed electorate are fundamental to the health of our democratic process. As the largest county electoral jurisdiction and one that serves among the most diverse populations of voters in the country, programs that support and facilitate voter education on options for participation and that promote voter turnout are inherent in Los Angeles County's responsibilities for administering elections – and appropriate resources should be allocated to support such efforts.

The County (County) had the lowest turnout in the state for the June 2010 Statewide Primary Election (23.5% vs. 33.7% statewide). This low turnout, in effect, minimized the County's voice in the primary. While the County has 25.64% of all registered voters in the state, the County accounted for just 17.88% of the electorate – an under-representation of approximately 443,317 voters when compared to the statewide average. As an illustration, had County voters participated at the same rate as the statewide average turnout, 1,464,762 Los Angeles County voters would have voted

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as opposed to the 1,021,445 who did.

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Among programs and activities that have been most effective in encouraging voter participation – especially in lower profile, off-year election cycles – have been those related to expanded access to Vote By Mail and the extension of the option for voters to select to be permanent Vote By Mail (PVBM) voters.

Permanent Vote By Mail voting has become increasingly popular among voters within the State of California and in Los Angeles County with the percentage of Permanent Vote By Mail voters increasing with each statewide election. In Los Angeles County the percentage of PVBM voters increased from 10.43% of registered voters in November 2008 to 14.91% in June 2010; however, the percentage in Los Angeles County lags behind other counties where PVBM voter sign-ups and participation has increased at a more accelerated pace.

County-by-county comparisons provide evidence that Los Angeles County's voter participation may decline further. One manner of combating that trend is to promote greater PVBM enrollment. A demonstration of the potential impact of increased PVBM enrollment can be discerned from 2010 Primary Election data which shows that Alameda and Santa Clara Counties – which are very diverse ethnically and economically – outperformed the state as a whole largely because of their percentage of PVBM voters and the rate at which those voters participated. With 4.44% and 4.53% of registered voters statewide respectively, these two counties contributed 4.76% and 5.93%, respectively, to the Primary vote. PVBM voters make up 47.76% and 67.36% of

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all voters in these two counties and made up 68.73% and 81.39% of their respective 2010 Primary voter turnout.

Thus, these counties had a greater impact on statewide election outcomes than their voting population would proportionally dictate. With 25.6% of registered voters statewide, Los Angeles County is trending in the opposite direction with only 14.91% of its voters enrolled as PVBM voters and only 18.19% of the actual 2010 statewide PVBM voters. In the 2010 Primary election, 58.12% of Primary election voters were PVBM voters statewide; in Los Angeles County only about half that, 30.05%, were PVBM voters.

As PVBM voters expand elsewhere in the state and turnout in higher percentages, the Los Angeles County portion of the statewide vote shrinks. In the 2002 Primary and General Elections, Los Angeles County made up 20.3% and 23.1% of the vote respectively. By June 2006 – after the initial statewide explosion in PVBM voters – Los Angeles County's portion of the vote dropped below 20% and continues to fall relative to other counties.

Some have raised concerns in the past that an increase in PVBM voting decreases relative minority participation, but the actual data reveal that minority voters participate in PVBM voting at rates only slightly lower than the voting population at-large and turnout is substantially greater among minority PVBM voters relative to voters who go to the polls on Election Day. Turnout among African-American voters in the June

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2010 primary was 22.50%, but 45.76% among African-American PVBM voters. African-American poll voters turned out at 17.33%. Turnout among Latino voters in the June 2010 Primary was 18.33%, but 34.28% among Latino PVBM. Latino poll voters turned out at 12.89%.

Currently 14.9% of Los Angeles County voters are enrolled as PVBM voters. Statewide the figure is 37.4%. If Los Angeles County increased its PVBM voter participation to 30%, statistically 300,000 additional Los Angeles County voters would have been likely to cast votes in the Primary. Instead of being just 18% of the statewide electorate despite being 26% of the state's voter population, Los Angeles County would have been more than 22% of the statewide turnout. That would have been similar to adding the entire vote of San Bernardino, Contra Costa, Riverside or Sacramento County.

Recognizing the limitations of the County's current voting systems and regulatory restrictions related to the security of voting processes; the need to preserve options for in-person voting; and to safeguard the electoral process from susceptibility to fraud, Los Angeles County should act quickly to make sure its voice is proportionally represented in the November 2010 General Election. Such efforts should include, but not be limited to, increased enrollment of PVBM voters, expanded voter education and voter registration activities.

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**I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:**

Direct the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk to develop a comprehensive voter outreach and education plan to encourage greater voter participation in the 2010 General Election including specific activities geared toward increasing enrollment of PVBM voters and to provide funding options for financing the execution of such plan for consideration by the Board of Supervisors at its meeting on September 7, 2010.

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